

Guest Editorial

From the ICBL 2007 Conference Chairs

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Interactive Computer Aided Blended Learning, ICBL2007, which took place in the period 07-09 May 2007 in Florianópolis, Brazil, has attracted over 170 scientists from Latin America, Europe, Asia and US to present state of the art research in the fields of blended learning, e-learning and online engineering.

ICBL2007 was organized by Centro Federal de Educação Tecnológica de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis (Brazil), in collaboration with the International Association of Online Engineering to promote technology-enhanced learning in Brazil and Latin America in general.

The conference has attracted a number of international and national sponsors and collaborators and received 160 submissions from scientists from over 50 countries. One reason for this large number of participation was the generous and moral support received from the Federal Ministry of Education, Brazil, the IEEE Education Society and the IEEE Foundation, in addition to the Universidade do Sul de Santa Catarina and the EU-supported Alpha projects RexNet and LEAL, and international corporations including Microsoft and IBM.

The conference comes at a time when many share the vision that learning would soon become possible "anywhere anytime", particularly with the advancement of multimedia, wireless technology, online applications, which provides natural access to services for all. But all these new technologies need a background in new pedagogical approaches and tools. The lesson, we learned from the short history of e-learning is, that the key to success in this area is to move towards developing educational processes that blend face-to-face learning activities with e-learning. Consequently, blended e-learning contributes a lot to the realization of this vision.

The conference was a very convenient forum to investigate how these new educational processes of blended learning can be used in different learning situations for diverse groups of learners. During the sessions the participants discussed types of learning models, adaptive learning, e-learning strategies, and methods to improve and evaluate the quality of learning like quality assurance, knowledge management, the connection of learning environments and learning motivations. The conference stressed the relation of web 2.0, social software and collaborative learning and also different ways of use of ePortfolios for blended learning. In fact, researchers have exchanged results, findings, tools and ideas that may contribute to knowledge and growth in this new and fast evolving field.

The conference was indeed a truly lively international forum for eLearning developers, researchers and enthusiasts in Brazil to meet and exchange experiences with leading international experts from Europe and the US and to encourage the study and implementation blended learning in higher, vocational and secondary education.

The conference presented an opportunity for educators from Brazil and the region to develop new skills and to stimulate critical debate on theories, approaches, principles and applications of eLearning, hence facilitate dialogue, sharing and networking between diverse cultures with regard to the optimal use of emerging technologies. On the other side, participants from abroad learned a lot about the big steps, Brazil undertook to move towards a modern information society with well educated specialists. E-learning is already very important in the system of higher education in Brazil and the achievements in e-learning enrich the international discussion in this field.

The participants were provided with the newest state of the art on educational processes, content resources, technology enhanced learning and their role in university education and potential benefits for learning purposes. Examples of the implementation by grids, online labs, laptops, tablet PCs, web 2.0 applications, and multimedia support for to enhance content of learning and the management of learning processes were presented, accompanied by experimentations to demonstrate their coherence and feasibility.

The conference has also hosted a number of international and national workshops and demonstrations of the latest technologies, systems and exciting new learning materials. A special track of the conference with demonstration, session and round table discussion was dedicated to WebLabs in Education (see International Journal of online engineering, vol. 3, No. 2 (2007)).

Three keynote speeches have also contributed a great deal to the success of the conference:

1. Paulo Roberto Wollinger, Ministry of Education, Brazil: "The e-learning as an alternative for the improvement of Vocational Education in Brazil",
2. Paul Lefrere, Open University UK: "Generations of Blended Learning: 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0",
2. Tarek Sobh, Vice Provost for Graduate Studies and Research, University of Bridgeport, USA: "Innovations and Recent Directions in Blended Learning: The Case for Interactive Research and Online Collaborative Engineering and Science Education"

Much is counted on the success of the ICBL conference as the Latin America struggles through its path towards stability and prosperity, which cannot be achieved without an active part from universities, especially those with a clear vision into the future.

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